

# **STRATEGIC MARKETING IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: AN EXAMINATION OF CURRENT PRACTICE**

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## **Abstract**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the research is to investigate strategic marketing in academic libraries, incorporating elements of organisational orientation, strategic planning, and processes and procedures to support these.

### **Aims and objectives**

The aim of the research is to build on existing literature, extending the knowledge of current practice in a relatively unexplored area within UK academic libraries. The objectives of the research are to identify key considerations for strategic marketing in academic libraries; to critically evaluate current theory on the subject; to explore current practice; and to formulate recommendations of best practice.

### **Methods**

A mixed methods approach was chosen, using survey and case study strategies. An online questionnaire was used identify trends in current practice, whilst telephone interviews enabled more detailed exploration. A geographical sample, university libraries in the West Midlands, was chosen due to convenience. All nine libraries were invited to participate; one chose to opt out whilst one did not respond. This resulted in seven libraries participating in the questionnaire, with five of those also participating in an interview.

### **Results**

The key considerations for strategic marketing in academic libraries emerging from the literature included market orientation, marketing planning and customer relationship management. Results showed that though market orientation is seen as a useful approach for libraries, the topic is relatively unfamiliar to librarians. Responsibility for marketing planning varied across the libraries interviewed, though all but one utilise groups to bring experience from different areas of the library. All participating libraries have some form of marketing plan and engage in customer relationship management activities, however formal procedures and embedding into service planning was not evident.

### **Conclusions**

Strategic marketing in academic libraries is of clear relevance to today's economic situation, and the research highlights the need for raising awareness of such issues and considering implications and barriers to practice.

## Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ..... (candidate)

Date .....

### STATEMENT 1

This work is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where **\*correction services** have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged (e.g. by footnotes giving explicit references).

A bibliography is appended.

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### STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my work, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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## Abbreviations

ACRL	Association of College and Research Libraries
CIBER	Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CSE	Customer Service Excellence
DCMS	Department for Culture Media and Sport
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
ISB	International Student Barometer survey
ITT	Institute of Technology Tallaght
LISA	Library and Information Science Abstracts
LISTA	Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts
NSS	National Student Satisfaction survey
OCLC	Online Computer Library Center
RM	Relationship Marketing
RSS	Really Simple Syndication
SCONUL	Society of College, National and University Libraries



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**NB:** Harvard APA style referencing is used throughout.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background

Traditionally, libraries foster knowledge and learning through providing access to information. Fundamental to the role of the library are Rangathan's five laws of library science (1931):

1. Books are for use
2. Every reader his [or her] book
3. Every book its reader
4. Save the time of the user
5. The library is a growing organism

The library has since developed to include other resources in both physical and electronic format (e.g. audio books, electronic books, CDs, DVDs, electronic resources), but the core values remain the same. In order to achieve these principle aims it is essential that users, and potential users, are aware of the resources and services available at the library and how to access them.

In defining the academic library of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Brophy (2005) further emphasises the two key elements of Rangathan's laws; the information resources and the user. Mathews (2009) focuses on the role of an academic library also being the heart of the campus; not just a place to serve the informational needs of staff and students, but a place to encourage collaboration and research and to host community activities. Both authors acknowledge that academic libraries are undergoing a dramatic change following external drivers such as educational and technological developments.

With the increase and widespread use of the internet in recent years, the traditional function of the academic library as a physical collection of research material is under threat. Godin (2010) highlighted a common perception that there is no longer a need for a library service, as information is now available for free online. In reality of course, quality information is not free, and the wealth of information available highlights another problem

– managing that information. Libraries and librarians are ideally placed to help users develop the information literacy skills needed to search for information efficiently, evaluate information they have found, and effectively organise the information.

Information literacy support was one of the main areas highlighted as necessary by the CIBER report (2008) in order to address the skills gap found in their research of the “Google generation”. The CIBER research adds to evidence that many students turn to free web resources before considering using the library to meet their research needs; OCLC (2006) found that 89% of college students begin their information search with a search engine, only 2% on the library website.

In higher education, there has been a clear shift to more student-centred learning, such as greater interaction during lectures, more group work, and inquiry-based learning (Brophy, 2005). Many students now study part-time or by distance learning, with full-time students likely to also have a part-time job, resulting in limited time for studying. Urquhart and Rowley’s (2007) research supported the notion that students are time-poor, concurring with earlier research that convenience is a strong predictor in information seeking behaviour of university students.

The need to visit the physical library building to study is reduced; students spend much of their research and assignment preparation time off-campus. They may visit the University library during evenings or weekends, rather than during traditional weekday working hours. University libraries increasingly offer support for these changes in higher education with developments such as increased online resources, virtual reference enquiry support, and longer opening hours.

In addition to these changes to library services and resources, the academic library building has also undergone dramatic change. Van Note Chism (2006) discusses the need for different types of study environments in academic libraries, with particular emphasis on flexible, comfortable working areas to foster learning. Most academic libraries include facilities for group working and presentation preparation, and many offer space for social learning or more informal study areas, to offer a rich learning experience and support for collaborative, inquiry-based learning (Dittoe, 2006; Huwe, 2007).

The role of the academic librarian has also adapted with these changes; liaison librarian roles are now more commonplace than traditional subject librarian roles (Attebury and Finnell, 2009), demonstrating a shift to a more proactive role in collaboration with the academic schools.

With so much change impacting the academic library's services, resources, and staff it is imperative to ensure the needs of users are being met throughout. The CIBER report (2008) supports this view, identifying a need for academic libraries to move from content-orientated to user-oriented, incorporating robust mechanisms to monitor and evaluate users and to adapt services in response to this data: "No library we are aware of has a department devoted to the evaluation of the user, how can that be?" (p.34). Effective marketing is one way to address this examination of user needs.

## 1.2. Marketing

According to the UK Chartered Institute of Marketing, marketing is defined as, "the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably" (2010). It is clear from this definition that the key consideration is the customer and their needs. A successful marketer can accurately identify and anticipate their current and potential customers' needs, and develop products or services to meet this need at the most appropriate time and value to those customers. Although there are subtle differences in different definitions of the term marketing, something which is central to all is the role of the customer and the importance of understanding their needs.

A common misconception with the concept of marketing is that it refers solely to the production of promotional materials. However, marketing encompasses much more;

"marketing is a management process whereby the resources of the organisation are utilised to satisfy the needs of selected customer groups... first and foremost an attitude of mind rather than a series of fundamental activities"

(McDonald, 1989, *in* Wilson and Gilligan, 2005, p.8)

Marketing is not just a case of taking existing products and promoting them to more customers; it is one of the core management processes of an organisation to assist them in improving current products, and developing new ones. It also encompasses the staff within

the organisation, the brand perception within society, and any potential method of customers receiving a message about the company, its products, or its services (Broadly-Preston, 2008). Marketing does not necessarily relate to just products, it is also important within service oriented organisations.

### **1.2.1. Services marketing**

In one of the leading texts in services marketing, Palmer (2011) examines differences between products and services, and highlights the need for a different approach to services marketing. Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2009) identify unique characteristics of services which make them stand apart when compared to products;

- intangibility (i.e. lack of physical element)
- heterogeneity or variability (i.e. no standard, consistent service)
- simultaneous production and consumption or inseparability (i.e. the service cannot be produced in advance, it must be produced at the time of consumption)
- perishability (i.e. the service can only be used at a certain time, it cannot be saved for later or returned)

Palmer (2011) also adds an additional characteristic; that of ownership (i.e. the inability for the service to be owned and for ownership to be transferred to the customer as would be the case with a product). These distinguishing characteristics mean that it is not feasible for services to be marketed in the same way a product would be, though some core marketing concepts apply to both product and services marketing.

Grönroos (2007, p.39) defines services marketing as;

“first and foremost a perspective of how the firm can relate to its customers and other parties... the management of customer relationships, and of relationships with suppliers, distributors, and other network partners as well as financial institutions and other parties”

The main objective when marketing a service to customers is to initially identify current or potential service users, and begin to develop a relationship with them. The service provider

can inform the customer of their services, whilst ensuring that the service is of genuine use to the customer, and adapting to suit their specific needs if necessary.

### **1.2.2. Strategic marketing**

Strategic marketing is the process that guides marketing in terms of discovering more information about our customers, their needs, and how we can meet those needs. Strategic marketing encompasses marketing research, marketing segmentation, the marketing mix strategy, and marketing evaluation – the main marketing activities examined by Cheney (2007), based on her analysis of marketing literature. Strategic marketing is an organisational philosophy, rather than a series of promotional activities.

### **1.3. Marketing libraries**

As Ranganathan explains;

"It is no wonder that, when the library has been extending its scope, changing its outlook and altering its very character and functions, there should not be adequate understanding... as to what has been going on"

(1931, *in* McCarthy Madden, 2009, p.7)

Without strategic marketing and the consequent marketing methods, library users are unlikely to be fully aware of what the library can offer them. As highlighted by Pantry and Griffiths (2009), marketing influences user behaviour within library and information services, but user behaviour (and the library's observation and analysis of this) also in turn influences marketing.



**Figure 1: Cycle to show relationship between marketing and user behaviour**

The library's equivalent of a business' bottom line is the library mission statement (Woodward, 2009). Marketing is not used as a sales tool for libraries, but as a way to understand user needs and improve awareness of appropriate services through successful communication. In this sense, marketing in libraries is not a new concept; librarians have been doing this for a long time (Duke and Tucker, 2007) – it is just the term marketing that was not used in libraries until more recently.

Marketing is frequently cited as unpopular among library staff (Lindsay, 2004; Singh, 2009). Kumbhar (2004) gave suggestions for why there may be a negative view towards marketing in libraries, citing reasons such as the belief that marketing is viewed as manipulative, unprofessional and unnecessary; it is misunderstood due to lack of marketing training and education; libraries lack marketing funds; and there is a reluctance to use techniques originally developed for the private sector.

In recent years, there seems to be a growing acceptance amongst the wider information profession that marketing is essential in libraries and information services; “marketing your library service should not be considered a luxury but a necessity” (Boden and Davis, 2006). This change of view may be partly due to the pressures from the current economic climate;

"Shrinking budgets, uncertainty surrounding the future of libraries and librarians? There's never been a better time - or a more pressing need - to market the Library and its services"

(Parry, Laing and Stephens, 2009, p.19)

The acceptance of marketing libraries may also be partly due to technological and society changes which have impacted on libraries due to an increasing number of alternative information sources;

“as potential library users become more reliant on the Internet, it is becoming more critical than ever for librarians to pro-actively market”

(Cheney, 2007, p.282)

The need for marketing libraries is critical to ensure users understand the added value a library and its librarians can give over freely available online information sources.



In response to budget cuts and societal changes affecting libraries, the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) published a Modernisation Review of Public Libraries (2010), which includes marketing as a skill essential to the modern library workforce. There are a growing number of jobs advertised for librarians with qualifications and/or experience in marketing (Dubicki, 2007), further emphasising its importance in today's libraries.

Much of the existing literature on marketing in academic libraries has focused on marketing initiatives and activities - print marketing materials such as posters, leaflets and tipsheets (Gaffney and Jones, 2007; Peters and Fiander, 2004); face to face marketing such as Fresher's Fairs (Bury and Phillips, 2005); and use of innovative technologies to promote online library services (Oxford, 2009).

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), in their 2010 publication, shifted the focus away from marketing techniques in order to address conversations on assessment, accountability and value. Their report on the value of academic libraries (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2010) presents a review of the literature, and makes recommendations for academic librarians to demonstrate the value of their libraries in clear, measurable ways. ACRL have also produced a toolkit to supplement the report (ACRL Assessment Committee, 2010).

This shift in approach to marketing in academic libraries supports Kotler and Fox's (1995) developmental model demonstrating the evolution of marketing in educational institutions:

1. Marketing is unnecessary
2. Marketing is promotion
3. Marketing is segmentation and marketing research
4. Marketing is positioning
5. Marketing is strategic planning
6. Marketing is enrolment [relationship] management

The stages of evolution seem to concur with the development of the perception of marketing within the library profession. Many respondents to the ACRLs previous study (Lindsay, 2004) were at the first or second stage of this model, whilst Mathews (2009) demonstrates that some academic libraries are looking towards the final stages of Kotler and Fox's evolution. Circle and Bierman (2009) confirm this transition in library marketing, demonstrating that marketing has progressed from being used purely as a promotional tool; "the days when marketing was thought to be posters and fliers is over".

#### **1.4. Research aims and objectives**

The primary aim of the research is to understand current practice in strategic marketing in university libraries. The purpose of the research is two-fold; to conduct an in-depth literature review examining strategic marketing in academic libraries, and to collect and analyse empirical data regarding strategic marketing in university libraries in the West Midlands. In order to achieve this, relevant marketing literature will be examined and critically evaluated in the context of academic libraries, current practice of strategic marketing in libraries will be identified, and examples of good practice will be highlighted. The research will conclude with evidence-based recommendations built from the findings of both the literature review and the research.

The key objectives of the research are to:

1. Identify key considerations for strategic marketing in academic libraries
2. Critically evaluate strategic marketing theory and current practice in academic libraries
3. Explore current strategic marketing practices in West Midlands university libraries
4. Formulate recommendations of good practice for strategic marketing in academic libraries

Objectives 1 and 2 will present a unique view on current literature, whilst objectives 3 and 4 will add to the research in the field of marketing academic libraries.

Society and educational factors, combined with the struggling economic climate, makes this timely research. There is a growing interest in the field of library marketing, both in terms of demonstrating value to customers, and ensuring the library adapts to meet changing user needs. This study will further develop the field of research into the importance of strategic marketing in academic libraries, and how this is currently undertaken.

The following chapter discusses the chosen methodology for the research and explains the rationale for the thematic structure of the literature, results and discussion.

## 2. Methodology

This chapter puts forward the justification for the methodology chosen for this research, outlining the research approach, strategy of enquiry, and the research methods chosen. It demonstrates the reasoning for a mixed methods approach (2.1), using survey and case study strategies (2.2), employing a literature review, questionnaire and interviews as the research methods (2.4). The chapter also explains the data analysis for the research (2.6) and discusses ethical considerations (2.7) and limitations of the research (2.8).

### 2.1. Research approach

Researchers have for a long time debated the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research “focuses more on numerical or statistical data” (Gorman and Clayton, 2005, p.3) during data collection and analysis; entails a deductive approach; incorporates positivism; and embodies a view of social reality as an external, objective reality (Bryman, 2008, p.22). Quantitative research begins with a theoretical framework from which hypotheses are drawn up and the variables of these tested (Pickard, 2007, p.18). This method is particularly useful for larger samples and to analyse comparative data, however as demonstrated in Pickard (2007, pp.21-22), there are a number of issues to address including:

- internal validity (i.e. ensuring the variable being tested is the cause of any change)
- external validity (i.e. gaining a representative sample to enable the data to be generalised to the wider population)
- reliability (i.e. consistency in findings across different times and locations with different researchers)
- objectivity (i.e. consistency in interpretation of findings across different researchers)

In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research focuses on analysis of words rather than numbers during data collection and analysis; entails an inductive approach; has an emphasis on the way individuals interpret their world; and embodies a view of social reality as an individual property (Bryman, 2008, p.22). Qualitative research is often used for exploratory research (Powell and Connaway, 2004, p.59), where the theory emerges

throughout the data analysis. Qualitative research must address the following inherent issues (Pickard, 2007, pp.20-21):

- credibility (i.e. the extent to which results can be trusted due to the methods used)
- transferability (i.e. the extent to which results can be applied to other similar contexts)
- dependability (i.e. the extent to which the methods used were appropriate and there is a clear audit trail)
- confirmability (i.e. the extent to which the results can be traced back to the raw data)

The debate over advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative research has led to a growing body of support for the mixed methods approach. This method can lead to increased validity and reliability through triangulation of methods to corroborate quantitative and qualitative research data (Bryman, 2003, p.608). Use of both methodologies may help to “neutralise or cancel the biases of other methods” (Creswell, 2003, p.15).

Due to the reasons mentioned above, the research uses a mixed methods approach; the main focus is qualitative to explore the enquiry in depth, whilst also employing quantitative approach to begin to gather comparative data on a broader scale.

## **2.2.Strategy of enquiry**

Quantitative strategies focus on analysis of broader data sets, seeking for trends amongst results. This research uses a survey strategy, “commonly used to determine the present status of a given phenomenon” (Powell and Connaway, 2004, p.83), to begin to identify trends in strategic marketing in academic libraries. Surveys are considered the most useful methodology to examine a number of cases and for exploratory analysis (Powell and Connaway, 2004, p.84).

Qualitative strategies involve more in-depth analysis over a smaller data set. In order to investigate the complex nature of strategic marketing in academic libraries, a case study

strategy was employed to further explore some of the themes emerging from the literature review.

Case study research is defined as:

“an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”

(Yin, 2002, in Pickard, 2007, p.85)

More specifically, the research is a form of collective case study (Pickard, 2007, p.86) as it uses a number of different cases (i.e. different libraries) and different sources of evidence to build a greater understanding about strategic marketing in higher education.

### **2.3. Sampling**

Due to practical limitations, a convenience sample was used for this research. The focus is limited to University libraries in the geographical area of the West Midlands; Aston University, Birmingham City University, Coventry University, Keele University, Staffordshire University, University of Birmingham, University of Warwick, University of Wolverhampton, and University of Worcester. The convenience sampling method has limitations in terms of the ability to generalise results, however it can act as a springboard for future research (Bryman, 2008, p.183). In this research, it provides an insight into the nature of strategic marketing in one geographical area and allows for more in-depth examination of good practice.

### **2.4. Research methods**

A triangulation of collection methods was used to increase validity and reliability of data, and to corroborate findings (Pickard, 2007, p.86). Each method is explained in turn below.

#### **2.4.1. Literature Review**

A literature review was the initial method used in this research, which enabled an investigation of existing literature and consolidation of knowledge from published literature. The literature search was planned into stages following advice from Hart (1998, p.32);

1. Topic defined
2. Scope defined
3. Outcomes defined
4. Housekeeping planned
5. Sources listed
6. Searches performed

In addition to the core textbooks recommended in Marketing of Services module (Broadly-Preston, 2008), literature searches were completed in Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts (LISTA) and Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA), with RSS alerts established early in the research process to ensure newly published research would be included. The primary search string used in LISTA was:

academic librar\* AND DE "MARKETING strategy"

This search string uses the Building Blocks methodology (Booth, 2008) to combine the two main concepts of the research; marketing strategy and academic libraries. The wildcard character is used in academic librar\* to ensure research using both the singular and plural form is included, and the MARKETING strategy descriptor was chosen to ensure coverage of all research about strategic marketing was included, even those which may not use the specific term. These two areas were then combined using the Boolean AND operator to narrow down the search to research incorporating both concepts.

A number of specific searches were completed to explore particular areas (e.g. market orientation and customer relationship management in academic libraries). Research into general marketing theory and practice was discovered from business specific databases such as Business Source Complete.

As the research takes an inductive approach, the search strategy developed as new themes emerged from the literature, whilst working within the parameters of the focus of the research (i.e. strategic marketing in academic libraries). This inductive approach to the

literature review followed some of the strategies from the berry picking method (Bates, 1989, *in* Booth, 2008) including footnote chaining, citation chaining, and author searches.

A snowball/chaining methodology was used to discover more research; many of the initially sourced books and research papers found on databases included references to other relevant reports, books and articles which were obtained as additional primary research. This accumulative process to collecting literature is recommended by Biggam (2011).

All sources of literature were recorded in bibliographic management software EndNote, with research notes added to each item. The literature was then evaluated, critically analysed, and synthesised, following the process suggested by Pickard (2007).

Due to a relatively low level of UK-specific research in this area, much of the material in the literature review originates from the USA. This provides impetus for further research as part of this study to widen the knowledge base about marketing in UK academic libraries. In order to identify examples of current practice of strategic marketing in academic libraries, a questionnaire and interviews were employed.

#### **2.4.2. Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was chosen as a method to gain a snapshot of practice across the region which could easily be compared and analysed. Practicality was also a deciding factor; questionnaire participation is often more feasible as it is a less intensive form of commitment than interviews or in-depth case studies and respondents can complete the questionnaire when it suits them (Gillham, 2007, p.6).

The questionnaire was developed following on from the literature review in order to further examine some of the core themes which emerged from literature; market orientation, marketing planning, and customer relationship management. The questionnaire used mainly closed questions in order to give comparable data which can be analysed to identify trends. Piloting was completed in two stages, as recommended by Gillham (2007); the initial stage to pilot the questions, and a second stage to pilot the complete questionnaire. Piloting at both stages included both a non-specialist and a specialist outside the sample.



One representative from each library was invited to complete the survey. After establishing the most appropriate contact (through the researcher's existing contacts and the library's websites), an invitation to participate (see Appendix A) was sent by email with a brief explanation of the research and a link to the online questionnaire. The email also included a request to forward the message if the recipient felt that they were not the most appropriate person to complete the questionnaire. Consent was gained via the start screen of the online questionnaire, which outlined the purpose of the research, the level of participation requested, and the use of any data collected. The final section of the questionnaire asked if the participant would be willing to be interviewed. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

Online survey management was set up using unique survey links, and this was used to send a reminder message if the survey had not been completed after 2 weeks, and another after 3 weeks. The survey was live for 4 weeks, with the end date stated in all invites and reminder messages.

Questionnaires are a useful tool for comparative analysis, however in-depth discovery is reduced by using a questionnaire (Gillham, 2007, p.2), hence using a multi-method approach to the research. In order to explore the research area in more depth, interviews were used to build on the themes from the questionnaire.

#### **2.4.3. Interviews**

The interviewing process followed the seven stages as recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.99):

##### **1. Thematizing**

The themes for investigation in both the questionnaire and the interviews emerged from the early research as part of the literature review – market orientation, marketing planning, and customer relationship management.

##### **2. Designing**

The interview was designed to complement the questionnaire, enabling exploration of the responses in more detail. The interview questions were piloted with a non-specialist and a specialist outside the sample.

Each interview was semi-structured, with guidelines established beforehand. This took the form of an interview guide as recommended by King and Horrocks (2010, p.35), allowing flexibility and the opportunity for more detailed discussion. A copy of the interview guide can be found in Appendix E. The interview questions were customised for each interviewee based on their responses to the questionnaire.

### 3. Interviewing

During the questionnaire, participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in a further interview to discuss the responses given in the questionnaire. Those who indicated that they would be willing to be involved in this stage were contacted after the close of the questionnaire with more details and an invitation to participate in an interview (see Appendix C).

Interviews were held over the telephone due to practical restrictions of time and cost, with the option for a face to face interview if requested. A minimum of one hour was scheduled for each interview, to enable time for familiarisation with both the researcher and the research itself.

Before the interview, a copy of the interview guide was sent to participants to give them the opportunity to prepare their responses. This also had the added advantage of them being able to use the guide as a visual prompt during the interview (Gillham, 2007, p.95).

As all interviewees had completed the questionnaire, they were somewhat familiar with the research but were provided with an introduction to the research and the purpose of the interview at the beginning and given the option to opt out at this point.

The researcher has experience of conducting interviews for research purposes, frequently using interviews to support discovery of emerging areas and reflection on current practice in library and information services. This work-based practice is the main method of preparation the researcher participated in, developing transferable skills in interviewing and

effective oral communication. Further preparation included revisiting the relevant primary literature to ensure the researcher was knowledgeable in the areas which were likely to be discussed during the interview. These preparation methods are recommended by Pickard (2007, p.171).

#### 4. Transcribing

All interviews were recorded to ensure accurate transcription following the interview; this also enabled the researcher to focus solely on the conversation during the interviews. Transcriptions were kept on a personal device accessible only to the researcher, and transcribed verbatim by the researcher into electronic documents. Following transcription, the audio recordings were transferred to the researcher's personal computer to be kept for one year following submission in accordance with Aberystwyth University Ethical Review Committee (2007). After this time, recordings will be destroyed. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, audio files and transcripts were stored using only the university name rather than the name of the individual.

#### 5. Analysing

The interview transcripts were coded and analysed thematically (for further explanation of this stage see 2.6).

#### 6. Verifying

Limitations in terms of verifying and generalising the data are discussed in 2.8.

#### 7. Reporting

Key quotes from the interviews were extracted and used in the results and discussion of the research (see Appendix F).

### **2.5. Response rate**

To protect anonymity, both libraries and individual participants are coded throughout the research. The libraries are numbered Library 1 – Library 9; with participants referred to as Librarian 1 – Librarian 9. The numbers correspond to the same library (i.e. Librarian 1 is from Library 1).

Invitations to participate in the questionnaire were sent to each of the nine libraries. One chose to opt out and one did not respond, resulting in seven responses to the questionnaire (Library 1 – Library 7). All participants answered all questions in the main questionnaire.

Of the seven questionnaire participants, six completed their details to be involved in follow up interviews. Following invitations to participate in interviews, five chose to continue in the research (Library 1 – Library 5) and interviews were held over a four week period following the close of the questionnaire. Four of these were held over the telephone, one was held face-to-face at the participant's request.

## 2.6. Data analysis

The raw data for the questionnaire was exported into Microsoft Excel for analysis. Microsoft Excel was used to create appropriate figures and charts to identify key trends, similarities and differences in the data.

Analysis of the interviews entailed a transcription of all interviews (using the recordings) and a thematic analysis to corroborate data with the questionnaire. The thematic analysis followed the recommended system by King and Horrocks (2010), using the following definition:

“themes are recurrent and distinctive features of participants’ accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question”.

(p. 150)

The thematic analysis followed the three stage process; descriptive coding; interpretive coding; and overarching themes (King and Horrocks, 2010, pp. 152-158). Themes across all interviews were labelled according to the participating library, before corroborating into a structured list which was used as the basis for the structure of the research findings.

Themes were aligned with the main considerations of strategic marketing in academic libraries (which emerged from the literature review) to gain a clearer picture of current practice in areas discussed in other literature. Key quotes were extracted from the interview transcripts to support the research data. A coded sample from the transcript of an interview can be found in Appendix F.

## 2.7. Ethics

Aberystwyth University research ethics guidelines for research involving human participants (Aberystwyth University Ethical Review Committee, 2007) were used throughout, and participation in the research was optional at all stages, with participants free to opt out at any point during the research process.

Respondents' confidentiality was paramount and the research data was only seen by the researcher. Libraries were coded throughout the research however due to the small sample size it may be possible for them to be identified; every effort was made to remove any identifying comments. Consent forms at both questionnaire stage (completed online – see Appendix B) and interview stage (see Appendix D) of the research explained the use of data; if at any time participants decided not to be included all their data would be destroyed and not used as part of the research.

## 2.8. Limitations

It should be noted that though the nature of the study warrants quantitative analysis to identify trends in the data, the use of convenience sampling means that the data from the research is not representative, and therefore lacks external validity. However, it is not the aim of the research for the results to be generalised to the population (i.e. academic libraries); the chosen methodology is a practical approach for the scope of the research, and is appropriate for exploratory research such as this study (Biggam, 2008).

In order to address limitations in terms of objectivity, all data analysis and coding was completed by the researcher. Information was recorded consistently and objectively with the core aim to improve reliability (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), dependability and confirmability.

## 2.9. Summary

The chapter has outlined the rationale for using a mixed methods approach, employing a survey of academic libraries in the West Midlands, supported by a collective case study. A literature review, online questionnaire and telephone interviews were the chosen research

methods, each of which the researcher has extensive experience with. The questionnaire and a sample interview guideline can be seen in Appendices B and E.

The research is presented thematically; this approach was chosen to reflect the largely inductive nature of the research. The literature uncovered key considerations for strategic marketing in academic libraries, and each of these is explored through the questionnaire and interview questions to expand knowledge of current practice, hence it is logical to present these in a cohesive manner. The following chapters therefore include literature, results and discussion on the core themes of relevance to the research; market orientation (Chapter 3), marketing planning (Chapter 4), and customer relationship management (Chapter 5).

### 3. Market orientation

This chapter examines the concept of market orientation; what distinguishes it from alternative organisational orientations, an assessment of market orientation in libraries (its suitability as an approach and current level of awareness and adoption), and an examination of the components of market orientation.

Organisations often attempt to discover who their customers are and identify their needs, however they may make assumptions about customers;

“Librarians, as well as other types of marketers, all too often fall into the trap of assuming that they know what is best for their customers, and consequently rush head first into developing and promoting a product or service before asking whether anyone really wants or needs it”

(Cheney, 2007, p.283)

A market-oriented organisation<sup>1</sup> is one that shifts the focus of their organisation so that everything they do is based on their customers’ needs. Kotler and Fox defined a market-oriented educational institution as one where the:

“main task of the institution is to determine the needs and wants of target markets and to satisfy them through the design, communication, pricing, and delivery of appropriate and competitively viable programs and services”

(1995, p.8)

This places the customer at the centre of the organisation, ensuring that the focus of all activity is to define user needs and develop products or services to meet these needs. Due to the nature and ethos of library and information services being designed to support users, the market orientation is a philosophy which fits well with libraries (Rowley, 2003).

However, Rowley (2003) identifies three alternative organisational approaches which libraries may adopt:

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<sup>1</sup> The terms market orientation and marketing orientation are frequently used synonymously within library and information science literature. However, Sen (2006, 2010) argues that this leads to further confusion and that there is a distinct difference between the two concepts; market orientation describes a strategic organisational focus whereas marketing orientation prioritises marketing and promotional activities. The term market orientation is therefore used throughout the research.

- production oriented (where the focus lies in making affordable products and services)
- product oriented (where the focus is primarily on developing the highest quality products and services)
- sales oriented (where the focus is encouraging customers to buy or use products and services)

In order to explore the current focus of academic libraries, question 6 of the questionnaire asked respondents to select the statement that aligns most closely with the focus of their library (each statement represented one of the above four approaches). The results can be seen in the pie chart in Figure 2.

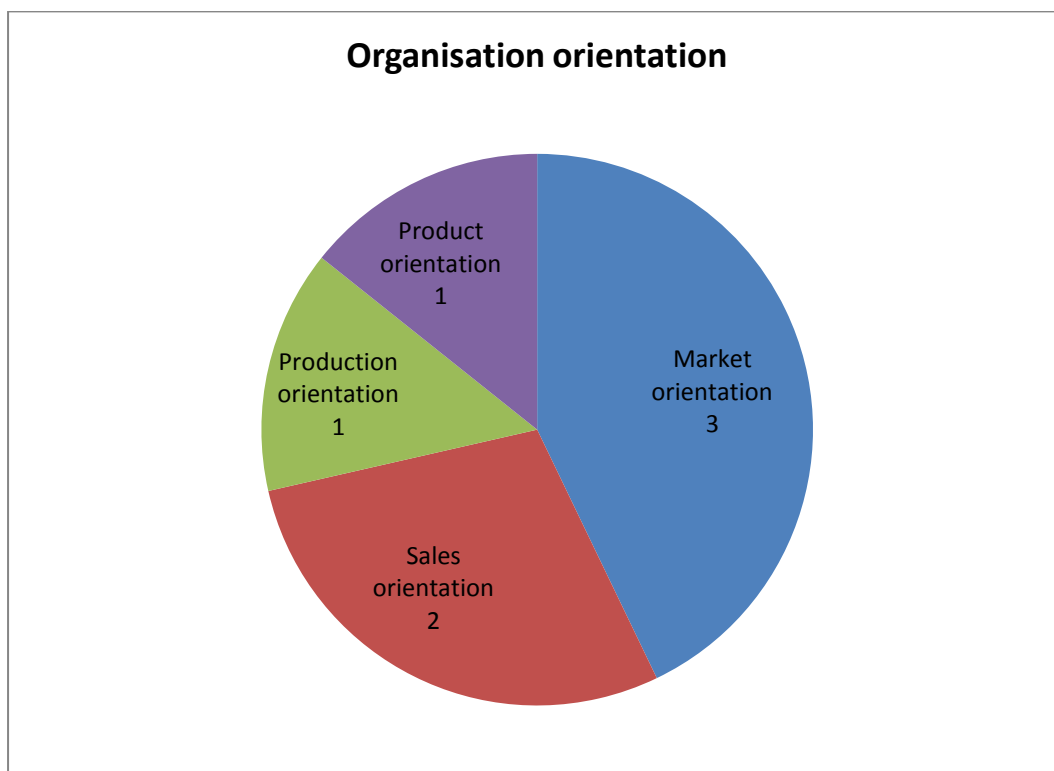


Figure 2: Pie chart to show orientation of the library

The most common response was market orientation, with three of the seven libraries selecting that response (libraries 1, 4 and 7). Libraries 2 and 5 selected sales orientation, library 3 selected production orientation, and library 6 selected product orientation. Further exploration in the interviews revealed that whilst librarians 1, 4 and 5 felt that their library



aligned very strongly with one of the statements, librarian 3 found it difficult to choose between the statements:

it was hard to choose between, it was hard to choose just one. I would say that I tried to choose the statement that overall summarised the situation the best (Librarian 3)

Analysis of free text responses to the questionnaire demonstrated that library 6 also struggled to define their focus, incorporating elements of all four statements:

In the current economic climate all librarians are looking at what is affordable, but that should not stop us from aiming to provide the highest quality services. We should also be looking to exceed our users' needs and part and parcel of our job is to increase awareness and usage (Librarian 6)

Sen (2006) used focus groups and interviews across library sectors to examine the relevance of market orientation, finding that it is a suitable approach for libraries. Sen (2006) also comments that whilst awareness of market orientation within libraries is increasing, her further research in 2010 suggests that there is misunderstanding of the term amongst librarians and there is minimal application of a clear strategic market orientation.

### **3.1. Awareness of market orientation**

Although market orientation was the most commonly selected statement in the questionnaire, the term market orientation was intentionally not referred to in the research questionnaire. Further exploration within the interviews asked participants about their awareness of market orientation and whether their library was consciously using this approach or had considered it.

Of those interviewed, only librarian 1 was previously aware of the term market orientation, correctly explaining the importance of gathering information about your users:

it's more about doing what your customer wants instead of what you think they might want (Librarian 1)

They felt that it was important to stay on top of current trends and to be aware of marketing strategy and trends:

you just have to delve into those things a bit really if you want to keep up with current practice (Librarian 1)

It should be noted that librarian 5 was also aware of the concept, but had not come across the term market orientation before or considered what it might mean for a library to be market oriented.

Interestingly, librarians 2, 3 and 5, who did not choose a market orientation, expressed a desire to move towards this, with library 2 already making a move in this way by confirming assumptions about user needs with their focused customer research:

wherever we can we try to establish what they want and see what we can deliver (Librarian 2)

Library 5 would like to be able to move to a market orientation but is concerned about being unable to meet user needs:

I would like to think that we could do more user needs analysis but under the onslaught of all the needs we can't offer more space or more books (Librarian 5)

### **3.2. Components of market orientation**

Jobber (2001, *in* Finney and Warnaby, 2004) identified three key components of market orientation:

- Customer orientation
- Integrated effort
- Goal achievement

In addition to the focus of the customers as the main asset of the organisation, this also highlights the need for all staff to be on board with the strategy, ensuring that each interaction with customers and all business activities help drive further forward with the larger organisational goals. Customer service is core to the success of a marketing oriented organisation; staff must be empowered, highly trained and motivated customer-led employees (Wilson and Gilligan, 2005).

Many libraries pride themselves on their excellent customer service, however this does not necessarily equate to a market orientation. Palmer (2011) identifies some of the ways services claiming to be market-oriented may demonstrate otherwise including opening hours designed to suit staff rather than customers and administrative procedures which make things easier for staff not customers. As these are frequent areas of complaint in libraries (Crawford, 2002; Satoh et al., 2005), libraries may not be as customer focused as they may initially think, and do not necessarily demonstrate each of the components of a market-oriented organisation. Broady-Preston and Preston (1999) also highlighted issues such as these when considering market orientation for libraries as a way to deliver quality services.

The British Library is one example of a library service which has shifted its focus from a product-oriented organisation to market-oriented. Finney and Warnaby (2004) shared experiences of how the British Library had adapted their focus by following Jobber's (2001, *in* Finney and Warnaby, 2004) principles of customer orientation, integrated effort and goal achievement. They argue that market orientation is relevant to all libraries, and is something which should be adopted if they are to be successful in future.

Each component of market orientation was explored during the interviews and is presented below.

### **3.2.1. Customer orientation**

According to Gupta and Jambhekar (2002), library science philosophers have advocated the customer as the focus of the library activity since 1880. Webber (2001) reaffirms this focus to "start with the customer, not the product" (p.22) to support the library service strategically and holistically. It was clear throughout interviews with librarians 1 and 4, who selected a market orientation in the questionnaire, that their focus is driven by customers and their needs:

relationship with the customer has always been a focus here (Librarian 1)

as an organisation we are very customer driven (Librarian 4)

However, librarian 4 also commented:

we very much try to focus on what we think the students need but they might not agree that what we think they need is what they need (Librarian 4)

This suggests that though they may most closely match a market orientation, they are not entirely committed to a customer orientation, instead taking elements of a sales orientation to identify and promote products and services that they think would be most appropriate.

### *Managing customer expectations*

Libraries 2, 3 and 5 also mentioned a focus on customers, however managing the expectations of customers was a common concern:

we've got to take a two handed approach, it's not just about meeting our student expectations or customer expectations, it's about also managing their expectations as well (Librarian 2)

we push what we can do or are able to provide for customers, rather than let them ask for anything they want and then say "well that's fantastic but we can't give you any of it, you'll have to just keep on with what you've got" (Librarian 2)

you've got the potential that you could raise expectations that you can't match (Librarian 5)

Hernon and Altman (2010) discuss methods of trying to satisfy customer expectations; however do not refer to management of expectations, which is a clear concern for libraries within their current financial constraints. Cook (2008) emphasises the positive effect managing expectations can have on customer satisfaction, demonstrating the need to control expectations and, if anything, under-promise so that you can over-deliver. Relating this to academic libraries, Begum (2003) recommends concentrating on one or two critical factors of importance to users, and building a strong reputation for those.

The need to manage expectations was given as the primary reason for one of the libraries in selecting a sales orientation focus:

there are alternatives that they're not using, so it's more about trying to promote things that would actually make their life easier (Librarian 5)

Library 2, with a sales orientation, mentioned that they took an 'organic approach' to help management expectations, working in partnership with users. The concept of users working in partnership with institutions is gaining momentum at present, with numerous

educational conferences featuring examples of this approach; Hilsdon (2011) for example presented on the concept of students as co-producers of their learning experience, and at the m-libraries 2011 conference Nicolai Dupont Heidemann of Kolding Public Libraries shared their experience of co-creating mobile services with users (McDonald, 2011).

### *Customer Service Excellence*

One current trend of particular relevance is the number of academic libraries achieving, or currently working towards, Customer Service Excellence (CSE) (e.g. Barrett, 2008; Brady, 2010; Whitfield, 2009). CSE replaces the previous Charter Mark and is based on key drivers of customer satisfaction:

“Customer Service Excellence aims to bring professional, high-level customer service concepts into common currency with front line public services by offering a unique improvement tool to help those delivering public services put their customers at the core of what they do.”

(Cabinet Office *in* Barrett, 2008, p.11)

Libraries 1 and 2 have recently been through the process of gaining the Customer Service Excellence standard. Though library 2 stated that the initial reason for this was due to internal and external competition (other departments within the University and other University libraries), they felt that the process had led them to reflect on their strategic approach:

having engaged in the customer service excellence and having met that, we are more conscious of what we are required to do within that and we're conscious of some of the changes we are making and what the effects are on the student population and our other customers as well (Librarian 2)

Others have commented on the benefits of both the process and achievement of Customer Service Excellence (e.g. Barrett, 2008). Broady-Preston and Lobo (2011) examined the role of external standards in academic libraries, focusing on the Customer Service Excellence as a case study. Their research demonstrated evidence for the value in achieving these standards by;

“reinforcing existing relationships and partnerships with customers, communicating the value of the service to external and internal stakeholders, and serving as a tool for improving service quality and the customer experience”

(Broady-Preston and Lobo, 2011, p.132)

### **3.2.2. Integrated effort**

Gupta and Jambhekar (2002) emphasised the importance for all library staff (from top management to front line staff) to understand and accept the marketing concept and philosophy; marketing strategy needs to be integrated into all activities within the library, not treated as a separate entity.

During the interviews, the topic of integrated effort arose with two interviewees; library 1 (with a market orientation), and library 5 (with a sales orientation). At library 5, all staff are involved in creating their section of the library’s plan which links into annual review processes to ensure all staff are committed to the strategic focus of the institution and the library.

At library 1, integrated effort was mentioned with specific reference to marketing, further supporting their market orientation. All staff are responsible for marketing the library and actively involved in all stages of the process:

you get staff coming to you with suggestions based on their observations of what students are doing and/or needing (Librarian 1)

The importance of involving employees through internal marketing was emphasised by Broady-Preston and Steel (2002a; 2002b). Though internal marketing is not the focus of this research, it is a concept which supports the integrated effort element of a market orientation and something that is clearly evident at library 1.

### **3.2.3. Goal achievement**

A common goal achievement for academic institutions is that of providing an excellent student experience. Librarians 1, 3 and 4 stated during their interviews that their institution had a clear focus on improving the student experience. Library 4 commented on the notion of students as customers buying into a student experience:

‘one of the things that's quite nice about this organisation is that whatever meeting you go to or whatever you're discussing, the primary context is always about increasing... improving I suppose... the student experience’ (Librarian 4)

However, librarian 4 also raised a concern from their library that the focus on the student experience risks alienating other academic library user groups (e.g. researchers, academic staff, and support staff) by not identifying or addressing their needs.

One approach which aims to address the variety of different users whilst achieving the common goal of meeting users’ needs is the personalised service approach such as the ‘library boutique’ model proposed by Priestner and Tilley; “a boutique library service model gives us the ability to provide specialist, personalised services” (2010, p.39).

Priestner and Tilley focus on subject specialism; however, the model could be adapted to take into consideration different user types, being responsive to their needs and adapting the service where possible. This individual level of customised service can also work to build stronger customer relationships and, in turn, develop loyal customers who will recommend the service to others (Guttek et al., 2000).

### 3.3. Summary

It is clear from the literature that a market orientation is an appropriate approach for libraries and one that may be suitable to help libraries at a time when funding is being reduced but expectations are high.

Market orientation was the most common response of the libraries surveyed, and three of the libraries interviewed with a different focus at present commented that they aim to adopt a market orientation wherever possible, particularly with regards to a customer oriented service and for some, an integrated effort from all staff and common goal achievement.

However, the research supports the view that market orientation is an unfamiliar term to many librarians. It also supports the findings of Sen (2006; 2010) that organisations give emphasis to only some elements of market orientation. Analysis of the results demonstrate that whilst the concept of being customer focused is of current importance to libraries,

other elements of a market-oriented organisation are not as strongly integrated to strategy, even in those libraries who selected a market orientation.

The following chapter moves from the culture of the organisation to strategic marketing planning, examining the planning processes and procedures and the staff responsible for planning.



## 4. Marketing planning

In addition to a strategic orientation for the library, marketing planning is an essential stage of strategic marketing. One of the most extensive studies into marketing planning in academic libraries was undertaken by ACRL. In 2003, they invited college and university libraries across the USA to answer their survey on planning, implementing, and evaluating marketing and public relations (PR). The results of the survey were compiled and published in 2004 by Lindsay, alongside case studies and examples of marketing and PR from the libraries. The results were enlightening, highlighting confusion over the purpose of marketing, and uncertainty that marketing was necessary for academic libraries; with comments such as “we don’t do marketing” and “would be inappropriate for our campus environment”. Although most of the libraries surveyed by ACRL were involved in some form of marketing, few had a formalised approach or documentation to support marketing, and an overwhelming majority felt that a formalised approach (e.g. a written plan of action, strategies and evaluation) would not benefit the library. The findings built on earlier research (Marshall, 2001) which demonstrated that while most academic library directors understood the importance of positive public relations, none had a formal plan.

In order to examine current practice, question 3 of the questionnaire asked participants whether or not their library had a strategic marketing plan.

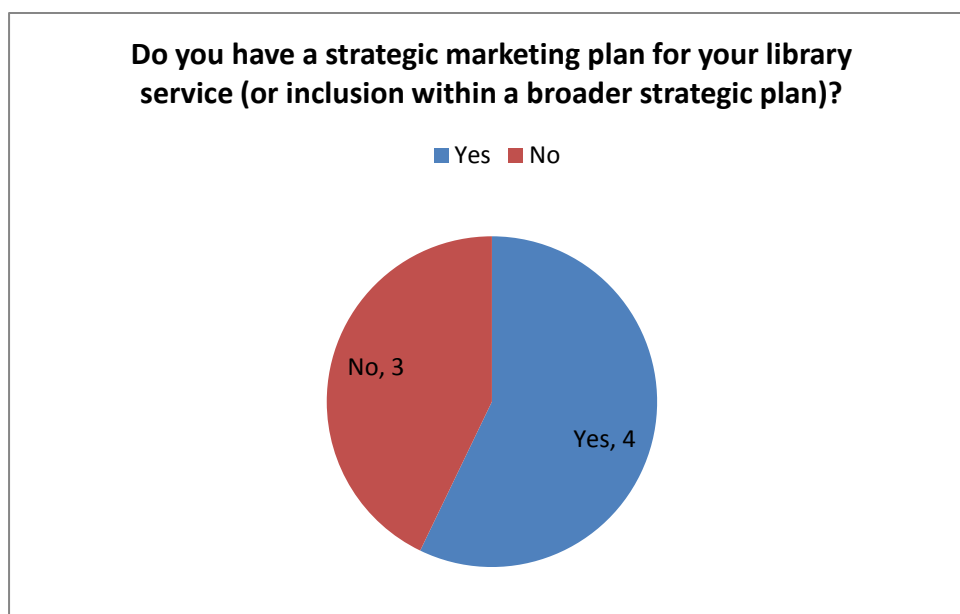


Figure 3: Pie chart to show frequency of strategic marketing plans

Figure 3 shows that four of the seven libraries (libraries 3, 5, 6 and 7) have a strategic marketing plan, or a section within a broader strategic plan (for example in the library strategic plan).

Further exploration during the interviews (three of whom responded negatively) showed that whilst they may not necessarily have a strategic marketing plan or a section within a broader strategic plan, they did include marketing within their planning:

there are elements which you could say are part of marketing within that wider plan but nothing which overtly says that this is part of marketing (Librarian 2)

These findings are similar to an investigation of a similar scale into public libraries (Broady-Preston and Steel, 2002a), whereby some libraries had marketing plans but more commonly marketing activities were included in a broader strategic plan.

Exploration into the nature and frequency of the plans showed libraries 2 and 3 have an annual operating plan for the library, with marketing objectives set on an annual basis. Library 1 reviews their operating plan and marketing activities twice each year, with an annual review of user needs to supplement the planning process.

Strategic plans tended to be more longer term, commonly on a 3 yearly basis. Libraries 2 and 5 use the institutional strategic plan to inform the library strategic plan, which informs the library marketing plan (see Figure 4).

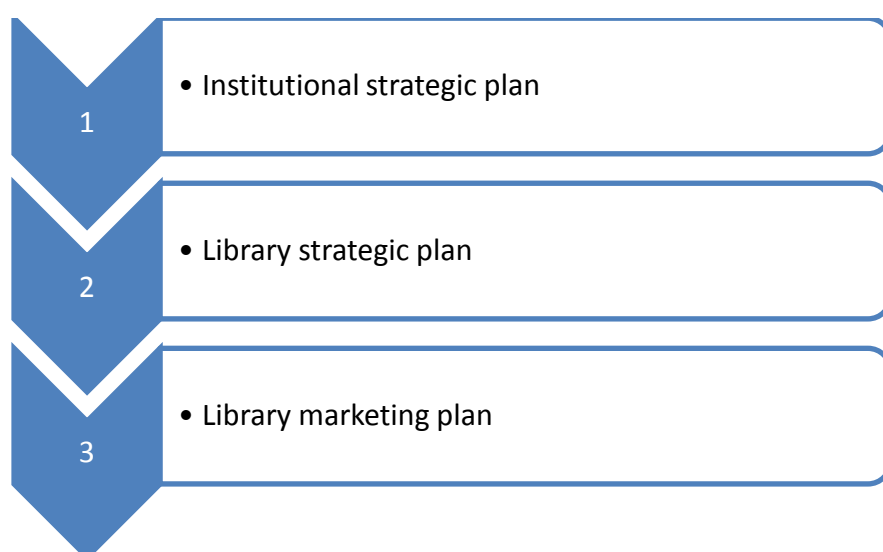


Figure 4: Diagram to demonstrate marketing planning process aligned to institutional strategy

However, library 5 mentioned that though they had a general marketing plan, they now prefer to devise a strategic plan for each marketing initiative including:

who the target audiences are, what the key benefits for them are, and what those messages may be (Librarian 5)

The importance of target audiences and the appropriate messages is reflected in Mathews' (2009); the main focus is on planning and development of relationships with customers.

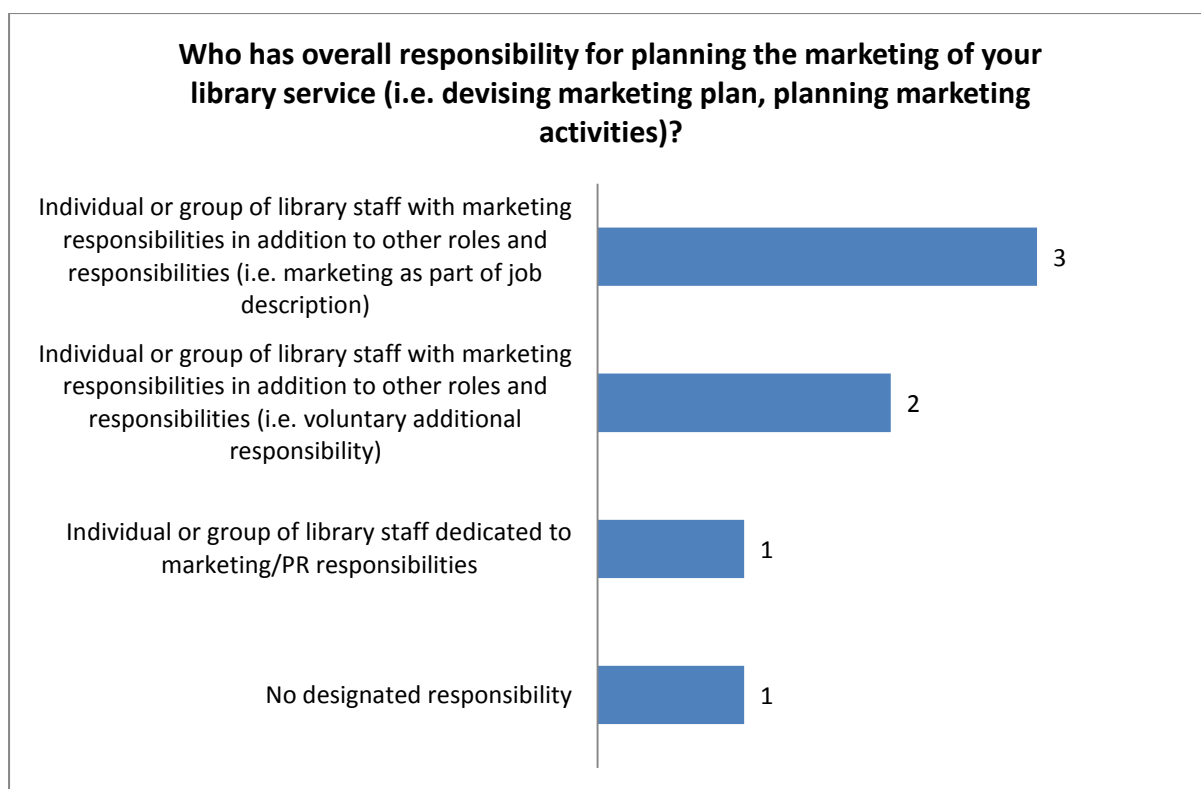
#### **4.1. Responsibility for marketing planning**

There are a plethora of different setups for responsibility of marketing in academic libraries, in terms of number of staff, level of staff, whether or not it is a designated responsibility, and the time available for marketing planning.

In the ACRL study (Lindsay, 2004) the most popular response to the question about responsibility for marketing planning was that it was the responsibility of the library director and/or librarians, though the majority stated that this was not included in the job description of the person(s) responsible. Number of staff involved varied - the majority had 1-2 staff involved in marketing.

In common with the literature, the responses from the questionnaire and further exploration in the interviews highlights that each library has a different setup with regards to responsibility of marketing – both marketing planning and marketing activities. The bar chart in Figure 5 shows the response to question 2 of the questionnaire about responsibility for marketing planning.

As shown, a mixture of responses were received though the majority, five of seven respondents (libraries 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6), identified that responsibility for marketing planning in their library lay with an individual or group of library staff who had marketing responsibilities in addition to other roles and responsibilities.



**Figure 5: Bar chart to show responsibility for marketing planning**

For libraries 1, 3 and 4, marketing is included in the job descriptions of these staff, whilst for libraries 5 and 6 they are a voluntary additional responsibility which is not part of their job description. Only library 7 has an individual or group of library staff with job roles dedicated to marketing responsibilities, whilst for library 2 no one has a designated responsibility for marketing planning.

To put this into context, the findings demonstrate that four of the seven libraries have marketing included in staff member(s) job descriptions, whereas three do not. Only one has staff dedicated to marketing responsibilities, with six libraries having staff supporting marketing alongside other activities. Though this has obvious advantages in terms of embedding marketing into library activities, it does raise questions about the perceived importance of marketing for academic libraries. As one librarian commented:

I think the main difficulty is that it's kind of in addition to the day job, I do enjoy it don't get me wrong, but it kind of gets shoehorned in (Librarian 3)

Though librarian 3 does not have responsibility for marketing specifically as part of their job description, it comes under the remit of a wider library role which is a requirement in their

job. Whilst difficult to quantify due to numerous variables such as seasonal marketing for key stages of the academic year, librarian 3 estimated that around 4-5 working days per month in total was spent on marketing (for both planning and promotional activities) for the library. Librarian 4 also commented on the competing demands placed on an academic library and the difficulty in making time for planning and undertaking marketing activities.

This issue was also reported in public libraries by Broady-Preston and Steel (2002a, p.299) with one respondent commenting that “marketing has had to take bit more of a back seat”. A number of potential barriers to marketing planning for service businesses are discussed by McDonald and Payne (2006), some of which were mentioned during the interviews including; confusion over planning terms (library 3); time-based ritual (libraries 1, 2 and 3); confusion between operational and strategic marketing planning (library 3); failure to integrate marketing planning into corporate planning (libraries 2 and 4); and uncertainty about what should be in the marketing plan (libraries 2, 3 and 4).

#### **4.1.1. Marketing planning groups**

At Oxford Brookes University, marketing is the responsibility of all staff, but is co-ordinated by a Marketing Group of approximately 7 staff representing each of the different sites and departments of the library (Brewerton, 2001). A similar approach is taken at Edge Hill University (Bury and Phillips, 2005).

Three of the five libraries interviewed have similar groups set up to support marketing planning; libraries 4 and 5 use this group to plan all marketing activities, whilst library 3 establishes working groups responsible for marketing particular projects/areas of service. Library 2, with no formal designated responsibility for marketing planning, has a communications group who plan publicity and promotional communications material.

Membership of each of these groups is established primarily by volunteers (as an additional responsibility not included in their job description), with some members being part of the group due to their job role or responsibility (though not necessarily part of their job description). The function of each group is slightly different, with some groups responsible for planning marketing but not responsible for carrying out the marketing activities (libraries 4 and 5), whilst others are involved at an operational level (libraries 2 and 3).

Library 1 does not have a marketing/communications group or working groups; responsibility for marketing planning is written into the job description of one member of staff, with their line manager (a senior manager within the library) providing a strategic lead for this. In this case, marketing activities at an operational level are the responsibility of all staff (contributing to the integrated effort element in their market orientation):

all staff are involved in the broadest sense; this is how we liaise externally, this is the impression we give internally (Librarian 1)

#### **4.1.2. Strategic direction**

In all cases, interviewees confirmed that strategic direction for marketing comes from senior management within the library (shaped by University senior management). Though phrased slightly differently, the findings of the ACRL study (Lindsay, 2004) suggest similar with 153 of 176 respondents selecting the library director as the person who initiates marketing and public relations activities at the library.

At libraries 1, 2, 4, and 5, a member of senior management is also involved in supporting planning, for example as a member or chair of marketing/communications groups. Interestingly, senior management involvement tends to be on an informal level, with both library 1 and library 5 commenting that marketing was included in a middle management job description, but not their line manager's job description (though they obviously had involvement through directing their staff). Library 2, due to their engagement with Customer Service Excellence, has recently rewritten a senior manager's job description to incorporate responsibility for marketing.

#### **4.1.3. Innovative approaches**

The interviews also uncovered some innovation approaches to marketing planning, particularly at library 5 with an institutional wide network of marketing champions who meet periodically to discuss marketing, and a student marketing group for the library. The student marketing group consists of students employed by the library for a few hours each week to support marketing activities. These have included customer research (e.g. observational analysis and user surveys), as well as acting as a focus group and supporting the work of the library marketing group by ensuring planned activities and material is

appropriate for students (e.g. correct timing and language). Although the group is primarily there to support marketing activities, they have the additional benefit of being able to relate well to students and helping to generate interest in the library with their peers. An example of this was when the students used the library's iPad to conduct a survey:

people came up to them during that and said "is that your iPad?" and when they said it's the library's iPad, they were interested in why the library has an iPad so it provided a good talking point (Librarian 5)

The influence of peers and their role in marketing the library was also highlighted by Millet and Chamberlain (2007) who focused on peer tutors as their opinions are very important to new students and have greater influence than librarians.

## 4.2. Summary

The research demonstrates that marketing planning processes vary in different libraries, each having unique structures and challenges. Whilst over half of the libraries surveyed include marketing in job descriptions for certain staff, the majority (all bar library 7) have other competing priorities in addition to marketing. Four of the seven libraries surveyed have a strategic marketing plan or a section within the wider strategic plan, though frequency of updating this varied from twice a year to once every three years.

The following chapter examines the activities libraries participate in to support customer relationship management; i.e. customer research, customer analysis and measuring customer satisfaction.

## 5. Customer relationship management

### 5.1. Relationship marketing

Marketing trends for both product and services marketing have recently demonstrated a shift from the more traditional transactional marketing (ending when the consumer has made a purchasing decision), to relationship marketing (a more long-term approach to relationships with consumers and providers). Kotler, a leading expert in the field, highlights that marketing has experienced a move from “a focus on the mass market to a focus on market segments to a focus on one-to-one customer relations” (2004, *in* Dubicki, 2007). Relationship marketing focuses more on long-term marketing efforts to discover customers’ needs and preferences, using this information to build a relationship with customers (and potential customers), and shape future products/services. This shift to relationship marketing has also been evident in libraries:

“relationship marketing focuses on getting and keeping satisfied customers, who, in theory, will in turn extol the benefits of the library to other potential users”

(Cheney, 2007, p.284)

In recent years, relationship marketing has been extended online with innovative companies such as Ocado and Innocent Smoothies developing dialogue with customers and building their brand presence on social networking sites. During periods of bad weather, Ocado keeps customers informed of the status of their order, and satisfied customers post public messages of thanks for successful deliveries, publicly promoting the brand to others. The Ocado Facebook page continues to develop these relationships (Facebook, 2011). Libraries are also utilising social networking sites such as Facebook (Alcock, 2009; Xia, 2009) and Twitter (Flood, 2009) to interact with users and build relationship with both current users and potential users.

### 5.2. Customer relationship management

Customer relationship management (CRM) is often referred to in a similar vein to relationship marketing. Although the two concepts differ slightly, with CRM concentrating purely on customer relationships and incorporating “systems and processes... to integrate



all sources of information about a customer” (Palmer, 2011, p.210), they have a similar philosophy; “both CRM and RM are concerned with building successful long term and trusting relationships with customers for mutual benefit” (Broady-Preston and Felice, 2006, p.527). A successful customer interaction for a library is one whereby the user’s needs are understood and taken into account when constructing the library offering.

In order to gain knowledge of current practice in academic libraries regarding establishing user needs, question 4 of the questionnaire asked participants to identify which customer research activities they utilised. The results can be seen as a bar chart in Figure 6.

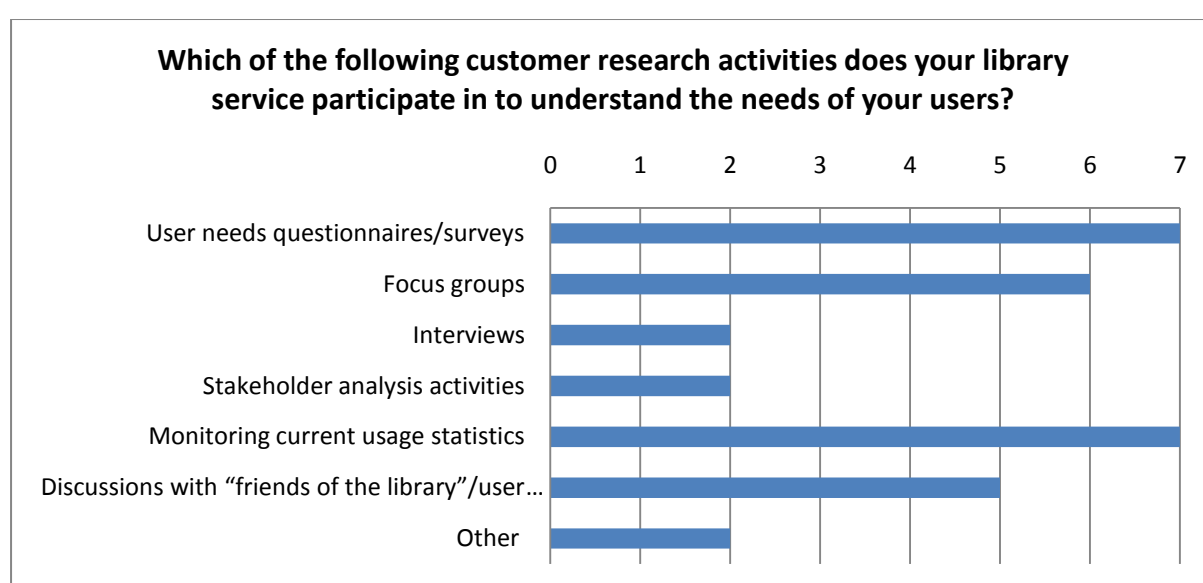


Figure 6: Bar chart to show customer research activity

As shown, all seven libraries surveyed use questionnaires/surveys for customer research, and monitor current usage statistics. Six libraries (all apart from library 3) use focus groups and discussions with user groups such as “Friends of the library”, two use interviews (libraries 1 and 2) and two use stakeholder analysis activities (libraries 5 and 6). The two respondents who selected “Other” included library 1 using observational analysis, and library 6 using feedback from student representatives. Each activity was investigated further in the interviews; they are presented in sequence below.

### 5.2.1. Customer research questionnaires/surveys

All participating libraries use surveys for customer research purposes; this echoes earlier findings from SCONUL (*in* Hayden, O’Brien and O Rathaille, 2005). Of the five libraries

interviewed, three (libraries 1, 3 and 4) administer surveys on an ad hoc basis, often linked to specific projects or service areas. Examples included surveys to gather views about opening hours and lending services (e.g. length of book loans). Library 2 does not use dedicated customer research surveys, but has questions in their annual institutional satisfaction survey to discover more information about user needs.

Customer research surveys were a common method utilised by libraries in the ACRL study (Lindsay, 2004); 80 of 177 libraries surveyed use a web survey to determine customer needs; 35 use a mail survey; 34 use an email survey; and 2 use a telephone survey (it is not clear how many libraries used more than one method so an overall total is not available).

Interestingly, libraries 2 and 4 discussed institutional restrictions regarding the use of surveys. Library 2 had previously administered an annual library customer research survey which had been stopped; whilst library 4 felt that they would be unable to:

we've not done a sort of overall "what do you want from the library" type survey and I think we would be told we couldn't (Library 4)

### **5.2.2. Usage statistics**

All participating libraries monitor usage statistics to support customer research activities. The types of statistics used for monitoring were explored during the interviews. All those interviewed monitor circulation statistics; libraries 1, 2, 4 and 5 monitor occupancy of the library; and libraries 4 and 5 monitor electronic resource usage.

The main reason given for monitoring usage statistics was to predict future patterns of use and to aid planning in response to user needs. For example, library 2 monitors self-issue statistics. An increase in use of self-issue helped support their decision to move to RFID to support simpler self-service. Library 5 uses statistics for benchmarking against other libraries, particularly with regards to electronic resource usage. The usefulness of benchmarking was emphasised by Sykes (2009), who recommends benchmarking data with institutions who have a similar mission to your own.

### **5.2.3. Focus groups**

Six of the seven libraries (libraries 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7) use focus groups for customer research. This is higher than the results of the ACRL study (Lindsay, 2004); less than half in their study (74 of 177 libraries surveyed) used focus groups to determine customer needs.

Further exploration in the interviews with libraries 1, 2, 4 and 5 demonstrated that focus groups are used to gather opinion on particular services or proposed changes to service. Each offers an incentive to participate in common with recommendations in literature (Ho and Crowley, 2003; Becher and Flug, 2006).

Focus groups can be particularly useful to gain insight into the needs of targeted groups of users (Walters, 2004); however none of the libraries interviewed targeted particular user groups, instead taking a more general approach to getting a variety of users together. This may not have been through choice; librarians 4 and 5 both commented that they had found it difficult to recruit, and therefore struggled to get a representative sample of users.

### **5.2.4. Discussions with user groups (e.g. Friends of the Library groups)**

Libraries 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7 include discussion with user groups as part of their customer research. Further exploration with libraries 1, 2 and 3 in the interviews show that these discussions are primarily with internal stakeholders, including student representatives from specific courses, key academics within departments (e.g. course leaders), student union representatives and senior management (e.g. pro vice chancellor for research, pro vice chancellor for teaching and research). Library 1 has a strategic focus this academic year to engage more with a variety of internal stakeholders to gain information about user needs:

[we have a] strategy this year to try to get involved in as many university initiatives to gather information from people who were at those initiatives (Librarian 1)

Libraries 1 and 2 mentioned that they had a “Friends of the library” group. Mathews (2009) recommends this methodology to build relationships with a group of users and to test new ideas. However, both libraries commented that it was difficult to organise to get maximum attendance:

theoretically it was a member of academic staff from each of the... schools, a member of undergraduate [student], and a member of postgraduate [student] from each of the... schools. In actual practice, apart from the staff, the students didn't turn up very much so it didn't kind of really function in that way (Librarian 1)

we don't really get very many attending (Librarian 2)

As a result of these difficulties, library 1's group was currently in abeyance, whilst library 2's group was being revised to create a smaller, more concentrated grouping.

#### **5.2.5. Interviews**

Libraries 1 and 2 use interviews as part of their customer research. Further exploration shows that these are focused on specific service areas and used to further explore the needs of subsets of users. Library 1 had used interviews to discover use of different areas of the library and opinions on noise levels – noisy vs. silent study space. Library 2 held interviews centred on the customer journey which they completed as part of the Customer Service Excellence process. Interviews were used in combination with other methods of gathering user needs, such as a survey, in common with literature (Cook and Heath, 2001).

#### **5.2.6. Observational analysis**

Library 1 has recently been involved in an observational analysis which they researched in collaboration with an academic school. This work involved examining the use of furniture in the library at set times of day over a one week period which helped them understand more about the types of furniture that are actually used and consider implications for future furniture purchases. Observational analysis is a potentially useful impact measure for libraries (Poll and Payne, 2006), however it seems a relatively underutilised method at present, despite being unobtrusive and relatively easy to administer. Librarian 1 stated that they had found it very useful, and would consider using the methodology again.

Though not mentioned during the survey, library 5 also discussed examples of observational analysis which have been undertaken by their student marketing group (see 4.1.3). This included observational analysis of use of different areas of the library and students' use of smartphones.

### 5.3. Customer loyalty and customer satisfaction

#### *Customer loyalty*

Relationship marketing places the emphasis on the customer rather than the product or service, and works to build relationships to increase loyalty. McDonald and Christopher (2003, in Harridge-March and Quinton, 2009) developed and refined a loyalty ladder model to demonstrate the stages in relationship marketing:

Advocate
Supporter
Client
Customer
Prospect
Suspect

Figure 7: Loyalty ladder

The model demonstrates how relationships develop from a suspect at the bottom rung of the ladder (someone who has come across your organisation for the first time) right through to an advocate at the top rung of the ladder. At the advocate stage, customers are so satisfied with the service (or products) received from your organisation, that they promote it to those they feel may also benefit. The goal of relationship marketing is to develop the relationship and move people up the ladder. Mathews (2009) discusses the value of library advocates and recognising who they are. He explains how they can act as library champions; sharing their experiences and encouraging others to use the library, whilst also harnessing their interest and using it to help shape the future of the library (via feedback on their own and other's needs and as a test bed for new ideas the library is considering).

Loyalty is one of the areas used to predict growth in a service organisation, along with core service excellence. Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2009, p.194) proposed a model of relationship bonds between the customer and the service provider, built around a core of excellent service quality. The model includes four levels of increasing relationship bonds: financial bonds; social bonds; customisation bonds; and structural bonds. At each stage the

bond between the customer and the service provider strengthens, increasing loyalty and making it more unlikely for the customer to change service providers.

### *Service quality*

Though it is accepted that service quality is difficult to define (Palmer, 2011), it is clear that it is an important concept in services marketing. Service quality is most commonly measured according to customers' perceptions and expectations (Cook, 2008). One common disconfirmation approach for measuring service quality (i.e. examining difference between customer expectations and perceived level of performance) is SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1988). The SERVQUAL questionnaire is a series of 22 items covering aspects of service quality – tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Customers are asked to rate their service expectations and their perceptions of the level of service on a 7 point Likert scale. The results are analysed to discover gaps between expectations and perceptions to identify areas the service is performing well in and those which need improving. As SERVQUAL is a relatively generic tool, it is also possible to benchmark services against competitors as well as use it for longitudinal analysis of service quality. Though SERVQUAL has its criticisms, such as the lack of weighting of importance of areas of service (Palmer, 2011), it is currently widely used as an industry standard measure. An adapted form of SERVQUAL has been developed for libraries. LibQUAL+® (Cook and Heath, 2001) is a “suite of services that libraries use to solicit, track, understand, and act upon users' opinions of service quality” (Anon., 2011).

### *Customer satisfaction*

Customer satisfaction is another factor mentioned for predicting growth by Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2009). The relationship between customer satisfaction (i.e. what people think of an organisation's quality, service and value (Piercy, 2008)) and loyalty (i.e. how long an organisation keeps a customer for or what share of their business they take (Piercy, 2008)) is not a linear one but an exponential one (Heskett, Sasser and Schlesinger in Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler, 2009). To put this into context, this means that there is a large difference in loyalty level between a 'satisfied' customer and a 'very satisfied' customer, emphasising the

importance of achieving high levels of customer satisfaction in order to gain loyal customers.

Customer satisfaction in libraries (via successfully establishing user needs and offering the most appropriate resources and services) is a strong predictor in determining future behaviour and recommendation to others (Gupta and Jambhekar, 2002; Rowley, 2003), and is therefore of primary concern for marketing libraries. It is clear that there is strong support for relationship marketing in libraries in order to move people up the loyalty ladder to become satisfied customers and ultimately library advocates.

Customer satisfaction can be measured using a variety of different methods, both quantitative and qualitative, including satisfaction surveys (online, telephone or postal), self-completion questionnaires (e.g. comment cards), mystery shopping, focus groups/customer panels, face-to-face interviews, suggestion schemes, and online discussion forums (Cook, 2008).

To explore current practice in academic libraries, question 5 of the questionnaire asked participants to select the activities they engaged in to measure customer satisfaction<sup>2</sup>. The results can be shown in the bar chart in Figure 8.

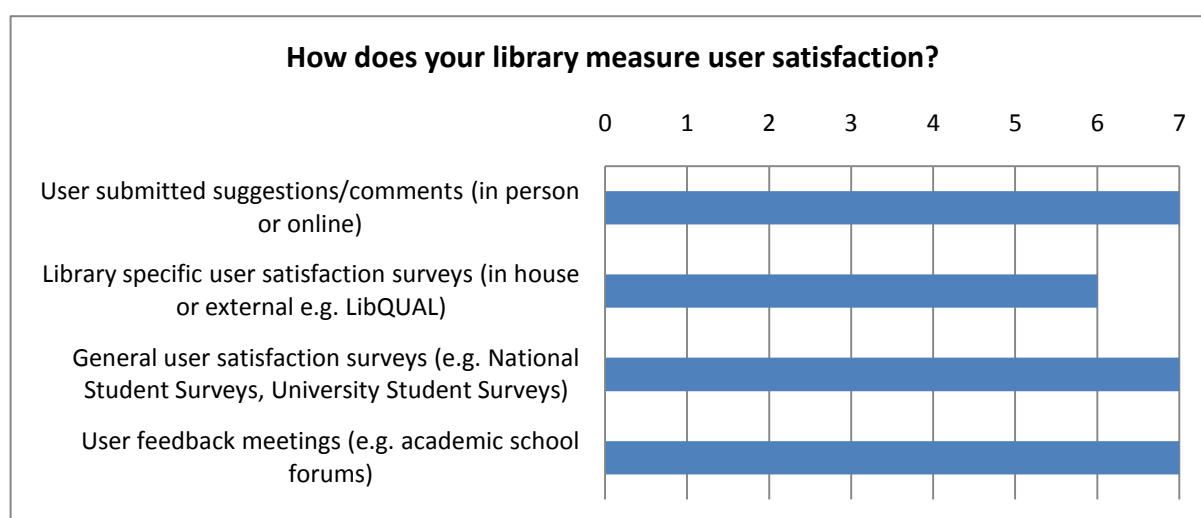


Figure 8: Bar chart to show customer satisfaction activities

<sup>2</sup> To try to separate this question from the previous question, the term user satisfaction was used rather than customer satisfaction. In this context the term user is used synonymously with the term customer.

As shown, almost all libraries selected every option, demonstrating that they each engage in a range of activities.

### **5.3.1. User submitted suggestions/comments**

All participating libraries collect user submitted suggestions and comments to measure customer satisfaction. User submitted comments and suggestions are common in libraries; 149 of 177 libraries surveyed in the ACRL study used comments to understand user needs, and 92 of 165 respondents used comments to measure the effectiveness of their marketing activities (Lindsay, 2004).

An interesting theme emerging from further exploration in the interviews is the move to electronic submitted comments. All libraries interviewed gave users the option to submit these either online or in person in the library, with library 1 commenting that the primary source of their comments is online. Online comments are easier to administer, respond to, and demonstrate good practice; Mathews (2009) comments that in his experience online feedback tends to be far more constructive.

When asked about how the comments are followed up, libraries 1, 2 and 3 mentioned that in addition to immediate personal responses (library 1 has a policy for them to be responded to within two working days), the comments and suggestions were collated to extract key themes and the library's response. Libraries 1 and 3 shared the main themes from the comments online and in the library (for example with a display sharing the common comments and suggestions); whilst library 2 shares the specific comments (anonymised) and individual responses. These approaches follow a similar system to that recommended by Mathews (2009) - both a personal response to each comment/suggestion and an anonymous copy alongside the response posted online to build an FAQ and demonstrate the responsiveness of the library.

Library 1 mentioned a more intensive follow up policy which is a requirement of their Customer Service Excellence standard:



we not only respond to them in a direct way, we actually ask them if the issue has been resolved to their satisfaction (Librarian 1)

### **5.3.2. Library specific user satisfaction surveys**

Six of the seven libraries (all except library 3) selected library specific user satisfaction surveys; however, it became clear during the interviews that the distinction between general and library specific satisfaction surveys was unclear to participants suggesting that this figure may be over-inflated. Librarian 1 (who had selected this option in the questionnaire) had misunderstood the question initially; Library 1 has questions within other satisfaction surveys, not a library specific user satisfaction survey.

Libraries 2, 4 and 5 have used LibQUAL+®, with the main reasons given for this choice because it is an industry standard and allows detailed analysis. Russell (2010) outlined the LibQUAL+® experience for Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT), Dublin, commenting on its importance in the library's engagement with users to understand their needs and inform strategic direction. In common with Libraries 2, 4 and 5, ITT Dublin also used the data for both longitudinal analysis and benchmarking with similar institutions.

Library 4 commented that they would be using LibQUAL+® again shortly, as they used it as their main tool for measuring customer satisfaction. However, they highlighted a number of shortcomings due to the fixed nature of the questions which has confused their users:

we get lots and lots of feedback... free text comments from people saying they didn't understand, or they found it repetitive (Librarian 4)

Though library 5 has participated in LibQUAL+® in the past, they have no plans to repeat it and now plan to run more targeted surveys on specific areas of the service. This would be in place of a more general library satisfaction survey due to concerns that this could raise unrealistic expectations:

at the moment because of the current climate and the focus on student experience, if we were to run a library specific survey you've got the potential that you could raise expectations that you can't match (Librarian 5)

This concern is shared by a number of libraries, as well as the concern that scores will be affected by changes that have had to be made to the library service, as shown by Killick (2010) in her communications with libraries using LibQUAL+®. However, Killick (2010) found

that despite changes made at Cranfield University library due to financial pressures, their LibQUAL+® scores remained at a high standard with no change in scores from 2009 to 2010.

Though library 2 does not administer a user satisfaction survey, the health library and trust library (working in collaboration with their own university and another local education institution) run both user satisfaction surveys and user feedback meetings.

Earlier literature (West, 2004; Creaser, 2006) reported high levels of use for the SCONUL survey template and Libra (a commercial product) in UK academic libraries; however none of the participants mentioned these during this research.

### **5.3.3. General user satisfaction surveys**

All participating libraries use general user satisfaction surveys to measure customer satisfaction. Further exploration in the interviews revealed that the main examples were the National Student Satisfaction survey (NSS), the International Student Barometer (ISB), and institutional wide satisfaction surveys. Brophy (2006) highlighted the importance of the National Student Satisfaction survey with the library contributing to the academic support element of this.

All interviewees use industry standard surveys (NSS and ISB) for benchmarking and longitudinal data analysis; however library 1 felt that the NSS in particular was far too generic to be of use. This view is shared in other literature;

“the fact that it asks only a single, rather badly worded question about libraries means that it offers no insight into what is good or bad about your library”.

(Sykes, 2009, p.96)

Institutional surveys on the other hand give libraries more specific data. Libraries 1 and 4 have input into questions about the library in wider institutional satisfaction surveys, and gain both quantitative and qualitative feedback from these. Library 4 uses annual institutional satisfaction surveys to gather opinions on certain areas of concern emerging from comments (e.g. opening hours, silent study areas). All libraries used a combination of the above surveys, following good practice as recommended by Sykes (2009).

#### **5.3.4. User feedback meetings**

All participating libraries engage with user feedback meetings as part of their customer satisfaction measurement. All libraries interviewed use academic feedback meetings involving members of staff and students representing all areas of study. Library 2 has a standing item on all meetings to enable ongoing two-way communication between the faculty and the library.

Information from these feedback meetings is often specific to a particular group (i.e. relating to resources for a specific course), but library 5 shared their process of pulling the information together from across the academic schools to identify common themes. Two librarians gave examples of how feedback through these meetings has led directly to a service development; a laptop lending scheme (library 2) and short-term access PCs for printing (library 5).

In addition to group meetings, libraries 3 and 5 hold periodic one-to-one meetings with key internal stakeholders to gather information on customer satisfaction – library 5 has library liaison representatives within each of the faculties who regularly meet with librarians. This personal contact between the library and faculties to develop relationships has been a key recommendation in literature on this topic (Raspa and Ward, 2000; Glynn and Wu, 2003).

#### **5.4. Customer analysis**

Although customer analysis was not an explicit question in the research, libraries 5 and 6 include stakeholder analysis as a method for gathering user needs, and discussion of customer analysis emerged through the interviews. Library 2 mentioned that they had been through a customer segmentation exercise as part of the Customer Service Excellence process:

we carried out a segmentation exercise for customers and we tried to interview customers from each segment to identify what their journey was and their experience was in the library (Librarian 2)

Library 5 often target their user needs surveys towards certain segments of users (e.g. international students, disabled students).

Those involved in LibQUAL+® surveys also have the option of sampling different user segments - undergraduates, postgraduates, academic staff, library staff and other staff (Creaser, 2006) – though none mentioned utilising this in the interviews.

### 5.5. Role of customer relationship management in planning

Interviewees had no formal procedure for customer research or customer satisfaction to feed into future planning - none had a defined process encompassing all elements. Library 2 is required by the University to produce an action plan for each survey to utilise the findings, and library 5 is planning to implement a system whereby each survey would be planned to ensure the data gathered would feed into the relevant place.

Hayden, O'Brien and O Rathaille (2005, p.49) highlighted the importance of using data from user research to inform future actions for the library or wider institution:

“it is vital that libraries act on or are responsive to the needs and concerns of its users as highlighted in surveys or other information seeking instruments”

Librarians 3 and 4 feed anything of relevance to a wide range of users to an internal meeting such as a librarian's meeting, but this tends to be on an informal level. Librarians 1 and 5 are working on developing a process to pull together information from all sources to review on a regular basis (once or twice annually) during the planning process for the library's operational plan:

we can't always solve all these problems but it gives us an idea of what we need (Librarian 1)

### 5.6. Summary

Relationship management is particularly important to service organisations such as libraries, and is being utilised by libraries through customer relationship management strategies to identify users, understand their needs, and measure their satisfaction. Methods used by the libraries in the research included:

- Questionnaires/surveys
- Monitoring usage statistics

- User submitted comments/suggestions
- Focus groups
- Discussions or feedback meetings with user groups
- Interviews
- Customer segmentation
- Stakeholder analysis

However, customer relationship management in the libraries surveyed tends to be on an ad hoc basis linked to service development:

In terms of trying to know what our users want, it tends to be in connection with particular service areas (Librarian 3)

Formal processes for strategic planning of library services were not evident from any of the participating libraries, and there is little evidence of this from the literature.

The following chapter concludes the research, pulling together the key findings and developing recommendations for best practice which have emerged throughout the research process.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1. Introduction

The overall aim of the research was to establish current practice in strategic marketing in academic libraries. The objectives of the research were to identify key considerations of strategic marketing in academic libraries; review and critically analyse the literature; conduct empirical research to examine current practice in a geographical sample; and formulate recommendations for best practice. The concluding chapter will revisit these objectives, reflecting on and concluding the findings of the research. Recommendations for best practice, based on grounded theory from the findings of the research, are also presented in this chapter.

### 6.2. Research objectives: summary of findings and conclusions

#### **Objective 1: Identify key considerations for strategic marketing in academic libraries**

Through an extensive literature review process, incorporating a literature search and evaluation, analysis and synthesis of all relevant literature, three key areas emerged of current relevance to strategic marketing in academic libraries; market orientation, marketing planning, and customer relationship management. These themes were used as the focus of research and used to support both the empirical research and the thematic structure to the final research product.

#### **Objective 2: Critically evaluate strategic marketing theory and current practice in academic libraries**

Literature from a variety of sources provided information about strategic marketing theory and current practice in academic libraries. The research evaluated literature both from business marketing theory and from library and information science literature, providing a full picture of the current situation. The conclusions drawn based on existing literature included a relatively low level of engagement with market orientation in libraries, a plethora of different structures and mechanisms for marketing planning, and widespread elements of customer relationship management activities, though with minimal strategic emphasis.

The relatively small amount of research focusing explicitly on strategic marketing in academic libraries, particularly in the UK, provided impetus for further data collection. Existing literature in the area shaped the nature of the investigation, highlighting areas in need of further exploration.

### **Objective 3: Explore current strategic marketing practices in West Midlands university libraries**

A mixed methods approach was chosen to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with a literature review, questionnaire and interviews chosen as the methods. The triangulation of these methods enabled examination of existing research and comparison across datasets, whilst also allowing for detailed exploration of the responses and reasons behind those choices. Data was analysed and presented thematically as a collective case study.

The main conclusions from the research support that of previous literature, with some additional findings. Academic librarians had little knowledge of market orientation (being somewhat familiar with elements of the concept but not with the terminology), though market orientation was the orientation which three libraries related most closely to<sup>3</sup>. Marketing planning structures and procedures varied across all libraries, however common themes showed; planning often being supported by a group of library staff from across the service. Due to the nature of the setup (i.e. staff having multiple additional responsibilities), marketing planning frequently competes with other priorities. Participating libraries all engaged with elements of customer relationship management, with many involved in numerous methods of both customer research and measuring customer satisfaction. These activities however are often on an ad hoc basis, with minimal embedding into the strategic planning process.

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<sup>3</sup> These findings must be taken in context – as the research was focused on gathering user needs and this question was the final question in both questionnaire and interview, it may have skewed the results. Though at no point it was mentioned that one orientation was necessarily better than another, the focus of the research was clearly slanted towards listening to users (i.e. market orientation).

#### **Objective 4: Formulate recommendations of good practice for strategic marketing in academic libraries**

The findings of the literature and the research have contributed to the development of a set of recommendations of good practice for strategic marketing in academic libraries, as shown in the following section.

##### **6.3. Recommendations of good practice**

The data collected from the literature review, questionnaire, and interviews has lead to the development of a number of recommendations of best practice for strategic marketing in academic libraries.

###### *1. Adopt a services marketing approach rather than a product marketing approach*

As the focus within academic libraries moves from product (i.e. books and other resources) to service (e.g. information literacy and research support), the approach to marketing needs to change to accommodate this; Adeyoyin argues that the “growth in services has not been matched by service management’s understanding or acceptance of the marketing concept” (2005, p.495). The research suggests a move towards services marketing, though it is evident from both the literature and the research that libraries are currently in a transitional period.

###### *2. Focus on measuring impact and value of your library service*

Building on advice in current literature (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2010; Research Information Network, 2010; Broady-Preston and Lobo, 2011), libraries need to demonstrate their value to respond to funding pressures. Poll and Payne (2006) recommend both quantitative methods (such as pre and post-intervention tests, performance monitoring, observation, and analysis of citations in research/assignments) and qualitative methods (such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, and users self assessment) to measure impact of the library service. The research suggests that libraries recognise they need to demonstrate their impact and value in meeting (or exceeding) customers’ needs; however strategies to do so are not yet in place.

###### *3. Consider working towards Customer Service Excellence standard*



Evidence from literature (Barrett, 2008; Broady-Preston and Lobo, 2011) and data collected as part of the research suggests that the process of obtaining the Customer Service Excellence standard, as well as continuing to work to the standard, is beneficial at a number of different levels – both internal and external.

*4. Understand the desired strategic orientation of your institution and your library*

The strategic orientation of any organisation should shape all its activities, though the research shows that some libraries currently are not aware of their orientation or their desired orientation. Market orientation may be an appropriate approach for libraries (Sen, 2006), however each library must consider its own context; institutional focus and structure of organisation may mean an alternative orientation is more appropriate.

*5. Include strategic marketing planning as part of ongoing planning process*

Though the benefits of strategic marketing planning seem to be understood by many library managers (Sen, 2006), the research supports the view that time is not currently allocated to this activity to the extent that it needs to be and marketing is not yet seen as a core management process in academic libraries;

“if marketing is truly to become a management process then it needs to become part of the culture of the library, be embedded into strategic planning processes and underpin library objectives”

(Henty, p.13 in Brewerton, 2008)

With decreasing finances and increasing competition from other information sources, libraries need to dedicate time to strategic marketing planning to position themselves correctly for their users.

*6. Use appropriate methods to understand the needs of your users and use this information to inform service planning*

As student fees increase, recruitment competition will increase and the role of the library user is likely to be seen as one of a paying customer. To provide the service they require it will be essential to understand their needs through methods such as customer segmentation, user needs surveys, focus groups, interviews, and observational analysis. As Sykes summarises: “knowledge of our users’ needs and preferences should be seen as a

core professional competence” (2009, p.99). The mere act of using such methods can also be a public relations tool to assist in marketing the library as it demonstrates that the library listens to its users and gives an opportunity to report back on how the library is developing to respond to feedback (Marshall and Reid, 2008; Becher and Flug, 2005). The research shows that libraries are using a number of these methods, however none have a formalised approach for gathering this information and using it to inform service planning.

#### **6.4. Lessons learned and future research**

The research process has highlighted a number of areas of ambiguity of both the literature and in the researcher’s knowledge of strategic marketing. This was evident not only in the literature review, but also during data collection as participants struggled to differentiate certain terms. For example, it became clear during the interviews that participants were unsure of the difference between customer research and customer satisfaction activities. Although the same methods may be used for both of these (e.g. surveys, user discussions/feedback meetings), the purpose is very different. The same is true of the term market orientation. For reasons previously mentioned, the term market orientation is used throughout the research product however due to the frequency of the term marketing orientation in library and information science research, this term was used during data collection stages. It is clear that libraries would benefit from clarification in these areas; future research should address such issues, particularly in light of support for a market orientation being a suitable approach for libraries to utilise to demonstrate their value.

Lessons learned during data collection included the nature of the interviews. Although telephone interviews were the chosen methodology, one participant requested a face to face interview. This method had initially been discarded due to time pressures and researcher experience in conducting telephone interviews. The face to face interview enabled easier sharing of resources; however the recording was difficult to transcribe from due to background noise. The advantages and disadvantages of each approach should be considered, with the same methodology used for each participant ideally.

The findings of the research warrant further exploration into strategic marketing in academic libraries. Over the course of the research, the need for academic libraries to

demonstrate their value in the face of reductions in funding and increasing competition from other sources on the web became more pertinent. As a number of the strategic marketing concepts support this, further research to both raise awareness and examine practical implications would be of benefit to academic libraries today.

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## Appendix A: Email invitation to participate in research

Dear [FirstName],

I am a distance learning MSc Information and Library Studies student at Aberystwyth University, and am currently collecting data for my dissertation on strategic marketing in academic libraries under the supervision of Dr Judith Broady-Preston.

My data collection is concentrated on universities in the West Midlands, and I would therefore like to invite you to participate in an online questionnaire on behalf of your library. The purpose of the questionnaire is to investigate current practice in academic libraries in terms of marketing planning, marketing responsibility, customer research activities, and user satisfaction activities.

Your name has been recommended to me by [CustomValue], however if you feel you are not the most appropriate member of staff to complete this questionnaire please forward the email to whoever you feel is most appropriate. Only one response from each institution is necessary.

Participation in the research is entirely optional. Please be assured that all data will be treated in strict confidentiality and will be anonymised in any publication of results. Further details about the conditions of participation are outlined on the first page of the questionnaire.

If you would like to participate, please click the following link which contains a consent form and the questionnaire: [SurveyLink]

The questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete and will remain open until Monday 28th February 2011. You do not need to complete the questionnaire in one sitting; you can use the link above to re-enter the questionnaire as many times as you need.

If you require further information before participating, please contact me [email address removed for confidentiality] with any questions.

Kind regards,

Jo Alcock  
MSc student at Aberystwyth University

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from me, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from the participant list.  
[RemoveLink]

## Appendix B: Questionnaire

### Introduction to research and consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Jo Alcock and I am currently studying MSc(Econ) Information and Library Studies at Aberystwyth University. As part of my course, I am undertaking a research project under the supervision of Dr Judith Broady-Preston. This project aims to explore strategic marketing in academic libraries in the West Midlands.

I would be very grateful if you would take the time to complete my questionnaire. It will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers.

If you choose to take part in this research please read the statements below

I understand that my participation in this project will involve completing a questionnaire about strategic marketing at my institution.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that the information provided by me will be totally anonymous and cannot be traced back to me or my institution. Details will be used only to assist in data analysis.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time and am free to discuss my concerns with the researcher at jo@joeyanne.co.uk at any time.

I agree that by completing this questionnaire I am giving my consent for the data I have provided to be used for the process of research.

Thank you in advance for your time and help.

Jo Alcock  
MSc(Econ) student

#### **\*1. Please complete your details below:**

**Institution:**

**Your job role:**

## Marketing planning

### 2. Who has overall responsibility for planning the marketing of your library service (i.e. devising marketing plan, planning marketing activities)?

- ☐ University marketing department
- ☐ Library director
- ☐ Library senior management team
- ☐ Individual or group of library staff dedicated to marketing/PR responsibilities
- ☐ Individual or group of library staff with marketing responsibilities in addition to other roles and responsibilities (i.e. marketing as part of job description)
- ☐ Individual or group of library staff with marketing responsibilities in addition to other roles and responsibilities (i.e. voluntary additional responsibility)
- ☐ All library staff share responsibility for planning marketing of the library service
- ☐ No designated responsibility
- ☐ Other (please specify)

### 3. Do you have a strategic marketing plan for your library service (or inclusion within a broader strategic plan)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If so, would you be willing to share your marketing planning document for the purpose of this research? Please share a link below if it is available online, or copy and paste into the text box. You may prefer to [email the researcher](#).

*Please be assured that the information within the document will be treated in strictest confidentiality, and will only be used to examine the type of information included. No commercially sensitive information will be used in this research and the documents will be destroyed a year after completion of the research.*



## Customer research

**4. Which of the following customer research activities does your library service participate in to understand the needs of your users? Please tick all that apply.**

- ☐ User needs questionnaires/surveys
- ☐ Focus groups
- ☐ Interviews
- ☐ Stakeholder analysis activities
- ☐ Monitoring current usage statistics
- ☐ Discussions with "friends of the library"/user representatives
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other (please specify)

## User satisfaction

### 5. How does your library measure user satisfaction? Please tick all that apply.

- ☐ User submitted suggestions/comments (in person or online)
- ☐ Library specific user satisfaction surveys (in house or external e.g. LibQUAL)
- ☐ General user satisfaction surveys (e.g. National Student Surveys, University Student Surveys)
- ☐ User feedback meetings (e.g. academic school forums)
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other (please specify)

## Library orientation

### 6. Which of the following descriptions most closely aligns with the focus of your library service?

- ☐ Our primary focus is developing products and services of the highest quality for our users
- ☐ Our primary focus is increasing awareness and encouraging use of our products and services
- ☐ Our primary focus is developing resources and services based on our research into our users' needs
- ☐ Our primary focus is developing products and services which are most affordable and convenient for our users

Please explain your answer:



## Follow up

**7. Would you be willing to be contacted for a short follow-up telephone interview about strategic marketing of your library service? Please provide your contact details if so and the researcher will be in touch.**

**Name:**

**Email Address:**

**Phone Number:**

## Appendix C: Invitation to participate in interview (information letter)

My name is Jo Alcock and I am a distance learning MSc(Econ) Information and Library Studies student based at Aberystwyth University.

You have indicated that you are willing to consider taking part in a follow up interview to further discuss your responses to the online questionnaire you completed.

Before you decide whether or not to be interviewed it is important that you understand:

- a) why the research is being done
- b) what it will involve

Please take time to read the following information carefully. If anything I have written below is unclear, or if you would like more information about this research project and what it involves, then please contact me (my contact details are listed at the end of this letter).

All the information about your participation in this study will be kept confidential. Details about how this will be done are included in Part 2 of this letter.

### Part 1 – Purpose of the research

The title of this project is strategic marketing in academic libraries, which is the focus of my dissertation for completion of my MSc(Econ). I am undertaking this research under the supervision of Dr Judith Broady-Preston. The data collection is concentrated on a geographical sample - universities within the West Midlands. The interviews will be used to explore the responses to the online questionnaire in more detail with the aim to uncover some of reasons behind the decisions made with regards to strategic marketing in UK academic libraries.

### Part 2 – Conduct of the interview

You are receiving this information letter as a follow up to your response to the online questionnaire for this research.

If you wish to be interviewed please sign the accompanying consent form and return it to me (my contact details are on the sheet).

I will then contact you to arrange a day and time convenient to you for us to talk over the phone.

Please note the following procedures about our telephone conversation/interview:

- **Duration:** The telephone interview should take about 30-60 minutes of your time.
- **Schedule:** The telephone interview will follow the question schedule that is attached to this letter (although you can raise other issues if you wish to do so).

- **Recording:** The telephone interview will be digitally recorded. This recording will be used only for this piece of research, and will be used in accordance with UK data protection legislation and the ethical research procedures of the Aberystwyth University.
- **Confidentiality:** All the information you give us will be treated confidentially. Both the *conversation* and the *information* you provide will be completely confidential and treated confidentially by the researcher.
- **Anonymity:** All interviews will be anonymous and personal data removed at the transcription stage. No individuals or individual specialist libraries will be identified in our results. Any direct quotes included in the report (that is, quotes of the things recorded in the interview), will be used selectively and anonymously (that is, no one will be able to attribute/link the words to you).
- **Data security:** The information will be kept securely, and for only as long as necessary to: a) analyse the research data and b) report on the research and its findings.

If you wish, you can request a copy of the transcript (printed words) of your telephone interview.

A full report and a summary of the research findings may be available via CADAIR, Aberystwyth University's institutional repository following submission and acceptance of the dissertation.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,

Jo Alcock

[contact details removed for confidentiality]

## Appendix D: Interview consent form

**Title of project:** Strategic marketing in academic libraries

**Name of researcher/s:** Jo Alcock

**Project authority:** This research project is being undertaken as part of MSc in Information and Library Studies from Aberystwyth University.

- |  | <b>Please<br/>tick</b>   |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the <i>Information Letter</i> dated 28 <sup>th</sup> February for the above study.                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have had the opportunity to consider this information and ask questions about it and have had these answered satisfactorily.                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to take part in the above study.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree to the telephone interview being recorded.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I agree that the data I provide may be used by Jo Alcock, within the conditions outlines in the <i>Information Letter</i> .                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I agree to the use of any anonymised direct quotes in the report.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

<b>Name of participant</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Name of researcher</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>

**Please return this Consent Form to:**

Jo Alcock

[email and address omitted for confidentiality reasons]

## Appendix E: Interview Guide

### A - Marketing planning and responsibility

1. Who is involved in marketing your library?
2. Could you explain who is responsible for planning the marketing of your library?
3. What is the procedure for strategic marketing planning? Is it linked to the wider institutional strategic marketing planning?
4. Do you have a formal marketing strategy or plan?
5. Who is responsible for ensuring the delivery of this strategy is achieved?

### B - Customer research activities

1. You mentioned that the library participate in *(list of applicable customer research activities)* in your response to the survey, could you explain a little more about how each of these activities are used? **NB:** *If none selected, ask to explain why (and omit 2, 3 & 4)*
2. Is there a particular member of staff that is responsible for customer research?
3. Does the information from the customer research feed into future planning for the library?
4. If so, how?

### C - Measuring customer satisfaction

1. You mentioned that the library participate in *(list of applicable user satisfaction activities if applicable)* in your response to the survey, could you explain a little more about how each of these activities are used? **NB:** *If none selected, ask to explain why (and omit 2 & 3)*
2. Is there a particular member of staff that is responsible for gathering customer satisfaction feedback?
3. How is the information from the customer satisfaction feedback used in future planning for the library?

### D - Marketing orientation

1. Are you aware of the term marketing orientation?



2. What does it mean to you?

*If respondent chose marketing orientation in survey response:*

3. Were you aware that your library service had a marketing orientation focus?
4. Is it something the approach that the library service has always had? If not, what was the focus previously? Please explain.

*If respondent did not choose marketing orientation in survey response, explain and ask:*

5. Has your library service considered focusing on a marketing orientation?
6. Do you think it might be something your library service would consider in future? Please explain.

## Appendix F: Sample coding and quote extraction for thematic analysis

### Annotated transcription

R = Researcher

I = Interviewee

Highlighted text = Quotes to include in results

R: OK, so the final thing that I asked about was marketing orientation.

I: Yes.

R: Are you aware of the term marketing orientation? Is it something that you are familiar with at all? Have you heard it mentioned before?

I: Not really, I mean it sounds like I ought to have done but not really.

R: OK. So, my understanding from my review of the literature for this research, I mean it is primarily a sort of business term, but it does apply to any organisation really and it's about the core focus of the organisation. So marketing orientation is that the core focus is to develop resources and services based on research into user needs, so that's rather than having something already there and promoting it, it's very much focused on what the user needs. So you actually responded with that particular response, o you felt that that was your main focus. Was that something that you think... was it quite easy for you to answer that question?

I: Yeah, I think in a way it was, because I think we're very erm... as an organisation we are very customer driven, and one of the things that's quite nice about this organisation is that whatever meeting you go to or whatever you're discussing, the primary context is always about increasing... improving I suppose... the student experience, improving opportunities for student access to different resources and services for students. So I think, you know, whether we are effective at researching what our students actually need, might be a slightly different question, but I think certainly the aim would be that's it's about what the students need. I think one of the... concerns that one might have is that what a student perceives themselves to need or want may not be what we as a library service feel is the best thing for them, erm, they might say "What I want is to be able to switch on my computer and have all the textbooks on my reading list there with a list of bookmarks and an electronic version, and all the journals that my tutor would like me to read there with little articles bookmarked for me so I don't have to do any research of my own", and we always say, "Well actually, you'll miss an awful lot if you do that", so I think we... We're conscious sometimes that we'll get bad press that, I don't know, they want 200 copies of a book in the library, and we'll say "No there aren't 200 copies of that book in the library so if that's what you wanted then no we haven't got what you needed", but we can say "Well, there are 300 books there in a similar topic that you could read".

**Comment [JA1]:** Not really familiar with market orientation

**Comment [JA2]:** Easy to choose orientation statement

**Comment [JA3]:** Customer-driven organisation

**Comment [JA4]:** Main focus on student experience

**Comment [JA5]:** Unsure of effectiveness in establishing user needs

**Comment [JA6]:** Uneasiness in relying on users' own analysis of their needs

**Comment [JA7]:** Can't always supply what users expect

NB: Descriptive coding from above comments are replicated and themed in the table on the following page.

<b>Descriptive coding</b>	<b>Interpretative coding</b>	<b>Overarching theme</b>
JA1: Not really familiar with market orientation	Lack of awareness of market orientation	Market orientation (lack of awareness)
JA2: Easy to choose statement of orientation	Aligned clearly to market orientation	Market orientation
JA3: Customer driven organisation	Customer-orientation across the organisation	Market orientation (components of market orientation – customer orientation)
JA4: Main focus on student experience	Organisation has a known and established goal achievement	Market orientation (components of market orientation – goal achievement)
JA5: Unsure of effectiveness in establishing user needs	Possible lack of commitment to focus solely on establishing user needs	Market orientation
JA6: Uneasiness in relying on users' own analysis of their needs	Elements of sales orientation	Market orientation
JA7: Can't always supply what users expect	There is a need to manage user expectations	Market orientation (components of market orientation – customer orientation)